



**A California Mentor Initiative  
Progress Report:**

**Designing an Internet-Based  
Virtual Mentoring Community**

**Andrew M. Mecca, Dr.P.H.**

**July 1997**





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#### Background

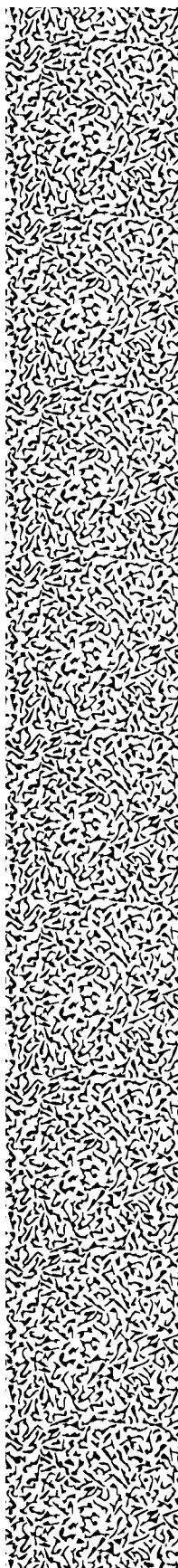
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In December, 1996, the California Mentor Initiative (CMI) Office presented a concept paper to a number of technology corporations. The intent was to elicit ideas on how to electronically link, via the Internet, school- and community-based mentor programs, in-kind and financial donor organizations, technical assistance service providers, employee mentor recruitment coordinators, mentors and mentees. Entitled "Discussion Paper - Designing An Electronic Central Nervous System", the vision for the project was described as follows:

- Any descriptive information about the (mentor) program or the CMI's progress towards recruiting new mentors has been obtained through the rather archaic methods of hard-copy surveys and telephone follow up. This method of obtaining information is burdensome

and time consuming to staff at the state level and especially to those at the local mentor programs. Our vision is to have an interactive, state of the art information management technology and communication system which contains the following elements:

- ☐ Comprehensive hardware, software, Internet and E-mail access capability for all local mentor programs;
- ☐ Data collection and reporting ability on demand;
- ☐ Technical support to local programs as needed;
- ☐ Ongoing guidance from a "working team" of representatives from different parts of the IT field.
- ☐ Guidance and oversight from a non-profit organization whose role is *facilitative rather than directive* of the implementation of this project."



At the time of the initial concept, the CMI Office described the objective of the project as designing a “central nervous system”. This metaphor illustrated the idea that an organized, coordinated mentoring movement in California may be viewed much like a living organism. Each component had a unique and discrete function, but operated as part of a coordinated system through the sharing and dissemination of information. It is our belief that the rich body of knowledge and technology available from and to mentor programs, combined with the accessibility of resources from supporting organizations will serve to sustain, expand and enrich mentoring through the interchange of ideas. Simply put, for small and all to frequently struggling mentor programs, knowledge means access to resources; resources means program development; and all of this means more mentors for young people. The CMI Office has devoted much of its efforts towards the building of this system, for it offers tangible, practical and measurable benefits to mentor programs through a partnership with government and business.

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### **Current Project Status**

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In the last six months, important strides have been made in realizing the CMI’s virtual mentoring community:

□ **The CMI Technology Task Force**

The CMI Office, in partnership with Government Technology, Inc., Oracle Corp., Microsoft Corp., Openworks, Strategic Advantage and the Office of the California Secretary of State has formed a technology task force to design and implement the Internet-based system.

□ **In-Kind Support**

In addition to the organizations on the Task Force, additional hardware and technical support have been provided by Compaq Computer Corp., Earthlink Network, Inc., MCI Telecommunications Corp., CompUSA and Dell Computer Corporation.

□ **Internet Linkage**

Earthlink Network, Inc. will provide free Internet access to local mentor programs participating in the CMI.

□ **Computers**

Dell Computer Corporation is providing pentium personal computers to ten local mentor program test sites. The hardware will enable the programs to assist the CMI Office in evaluating the practical applications of the data collection components designed into the new CMI web-site.

□ **Website Server**

The server unit for the CMI website has been donated by Compaq Computer Corporation. The server has been installed at the Office of the California Secretary of State, with site staff support to be provided by both the CMI Office and the Secretary of State. Telephone linkage between the server and the Internet has been donated by MCI Telecommunications Corporation.

□ **Website and Data Collection Survey Design**

Extensive design support for the website and the mentor program data collection survey has been provided by the Oracle Corporation. The survey will offer a mechanism by which local programs can track mentor process performance for their own reporting needs, as well as transmit non-confidential information to the CMI Office. This cumulative data collection capability will allow the CMI Office to identify, from a statewide perspective, progress and challenges in the expansion of mentoring resources in all of California's 58 counties.

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**New Opportunities - The Next Three to Six Months**

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The results discussed above will lead to the following actions to

be implemented by the end of 1997.

□ **Refining the CMI Database - the CMI Quality Assurance Standards**

As the new CMI system nears completion, it is essential to define which local mentor programs will be invited to participate. In May, 1997, the California Mentor Coalition adopted ten quality assurance standards, modeled closely on those developed earlier by the National One-to-One organization. The standards are designed to foster service excellence by promoting practices that will assure program stability and protection for mentees. In June, 1997, the CMI Office surveyed all of the 350 programs in its database to determine their consistency with the ten standards. Programs which responded and indicated voluntary application of the standards will immediately be incorporated into the new CMI database, and offered the benefits of the virtual mentoring community system. Responding programs which have not demonstrated consistency with the standards will be offered no-cost technical assistance from the CMI Office. The first phase of this effort will be completed August 1, 1997 with an anticipated 130 programs incorporated in the new

data base. Additional programs will be added on a continuing basis.

☐ **Completion of the System Evaluation**

In cooperation with ten local mentor program sites, the CMI website data collection surveys will be tested and refined, with modifications added as needed. Completion of the test program is anticipated for September 1, 1997.

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**New Opportunities - The Next Twelve to Eighteen Months**

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By the end of 1998, the CMI Office will have achieved the following objectives:

☐ **Technical Training Support Services**

As mentor programs come on-line and use the CMI system, no-cost training and technical assistance will be made available to aid in their accessing of the system's increasing capabilities and services.

☐ **The Grant Resource Center**

Prospective financial donor organizations will be solicited to offer grants directly to participating CMI programs through the use of the website. Mentor programs will be able to complete their proposal and submit it electronically to the donor organization.

☐ **Electronic Mentor Application**

Individuals interested in learning more about a local mentor program will be able to complete a preliminary questionnaire and transmit it directly by e-mail to one or more selected programs contained in the CMI data base and organized by county.

☐ **Electronic Background Checks**

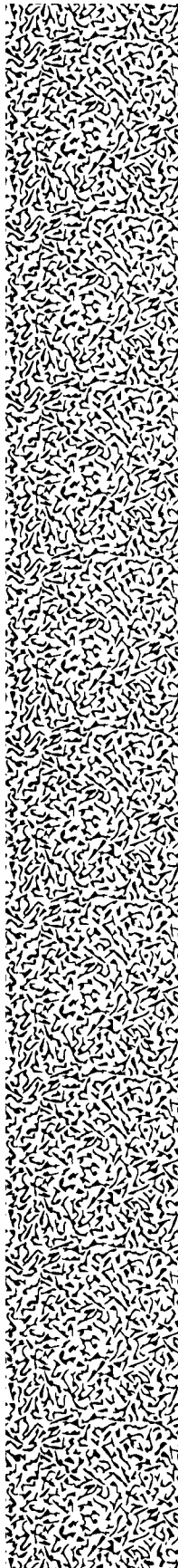
Mentor programs will have electronic access to law enforcement background investigation centers, thereby enabling the prompt determination of the suitability of a prospective mentor.

☐ **Data Collection**

The system will contain program performance data collection surveys and e-mail submission between mentor programs and the CMI Office. This cumulative data collection ability will allow for the statewide tracking of mentor and mentee recruitment progress and program resource needs.

☐ **Report Generation**

Local CMI mentor programs will have the capability to use their performance data for the development of progress reports illustrating program achievements for consideration by local resource donors, their program board of directors, etc.



☐ **Mentor & Mentee Incentives**

The system will display incentives from participating businesses (e.g., activity discounts, reduced theme park entrance fees, gifts, clothing discounts, etc.) available to mentors and their mentees as in-kind support for their continued participation.

☐ **Mentor Program Business Support**

CMI mentor programs will receive software that provides non-profit business management functions for mentor programs (i.e., Microsoft Office).

☐ **The On-Line Mentor Library**

A library containing the complete texts of program development, operation, training and evaluation publications with download and print capability will be available from the CMI Office's Mentor Resource Center.

☐ **Cyber U.**

CMI mentor programs will be able to access no-cost training services, such as techniques in non-profit business management, mentor recruitment and fund raising practices. Training curriculums for mentors will include methods in working with kids of diverse background and dealing with unique challenges.

☐ **Bulletin Board, E-mail and "Chat Room" Services**

The system will provide the capability of mentor programs to directly share information with one another.

☐ **Business Support Incentives**

Organizations wishing to offer in-kind support to CMI mentor programs will be able to advertise their incentives, such as product discounts and business services.

Individuals and organizations interested in learning more about the CMI's virtual mentoring community can contact the CMI Office at 1-800-444-3066 (California only), or (916) 327-3728 and please ask for David Monti. ☐